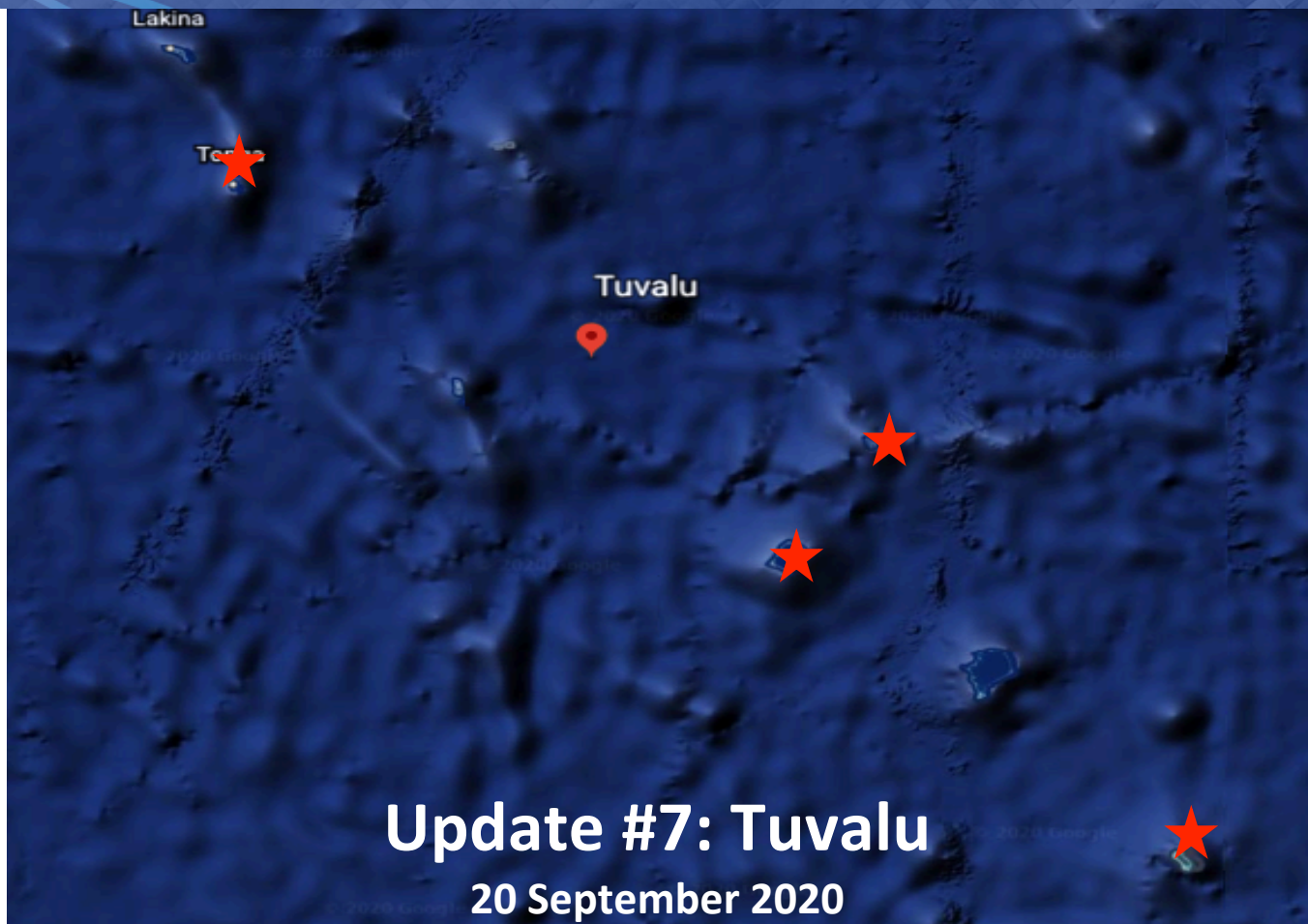


COVID-19 IMPACTS ON FISHING AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES



Summary

Twenty key informants from four islands in Tuvalu were interviewed in June to investigate the associated impacts from the coronavirus pandemic on island and coastal communities. Results have shown that:

- COVID-19 government restrictions appear to have affected the majority of respondents through disrupted shipping services reducing canteen stocks and fuel availability, and an increasing population from residents returning from Funafuti,
- There was an overall average increase in population of 28% observed in three islands, outward migration was observed from one island, Nukufetau,
- Food availability issues were reported by a majority; a third stated there was enough local food, with a shortage only in imported foods,
- Increased prices of tinned fish was reported by 85% of respondents and increased prices of rice by 70%,
- Farming and fishing activities were noticed to increase as reported by half the respondents, whilst offshore fishing activities have decreased due to low fuel availability as reported by about half of the respondents,
- Fisheries management rules are currently being respected. Informants from Nanumaga Island mention the *Te Akau* Conservation Area as supporting marine management efforts,
- When asked about additional support they would need for coping with COVID-19 impacts, respondents listed price controls, medical personnel, financial assistance and stricter border control.



Introduction

The majority of Pacific island nations have been lucky to avoid the health implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tuvalu (pop. 11,824¹) has had no cases of the coronavirus, but measures have been taken by the government to prevent infections. In January, a Ministry of Health COVID-19 Task Force was formed, but also, Tropical Cyclone Tino struck, affecting half the population and causing government to declare a State of Emergency. In March, another State of Emergency was declared for COVID-19. The new regulations enabled the government to close the borders to all flights and ships, except essential supplies and services, impose quarantine requirements, place restrictions on social gatherings, and control the supply and prices of import products. Schools were closed from the end of March to early June, and residents encouraged to relocate from the capital city of Funafuti to home villages in the outer islands.

What did we do?

A rapid response survey questionnaire was designed to investigate the impacts of national responses to the coronavirus pandemic on coastal and island communities. Staff from the Tuvalu Fisheries Department and Ridge to Reef project conducted phone interviews with twenty key informants from the *kaupule* network of Tuvalu. Nine women and eleven men from four islands were surveyed: Nukufetau (n=2), Vaitupu (n=4), Nukulaelae (n=1), and Nanumaga (n=13) from June 4 – 11. Respondents were of all age groups, including youth.

Our Findings

Major Events

When asked about major events affecting the communities this year, a third of respondents mentioned the coronavirus pandemic, while another nine respondents (45%) mentioned impacts resulting from restrictions, but did not mention the cause of these. Six male and two

female respondents referred to a shortage of supplies in shops (40%), and one respondent mentioned returning residents from Funafuti.

“The island is in lockdown from the time we heard news about the virus and so we have stopped community gatherings.”

Two males and two females (20%) also mentioned pests that affected plant life but this has been an ongoing problem in Tuvalu.

Event	Female (F)	Male (M)	Total
COVID-19	3	3	6
Other	5	8	13
None	1	0	1
Total	9	11	20

Eighteen respondents (90%) observed an increase in village population over the survey period; respondents from the islands of Nanumaga, Vaitupu, and Nukulaelae reported an average increase of about 28%. Such high immigration rates can most likely be attributed to government encouraging residents in Funafuti to return to their island villages. Outward migration was observed only and by both respondents from Nukufetau Island.

Food Security

Seventy percent of informants stated that there was not enough food available in the village: nine from Nanumaga, two from Nukufetau, and three from Vaitupu. This was attributed to an increasing population from the mainland as well as disrupted shipping services resulting from government COVID-19 restrictions, which led to a shortage in village canteens.

Food avail. In village	F	M	Tot.	%
Big problem	3	0	3	15%
Not enough	4	7	11	55%
Enough	2	2	4	20%
More than enough	0	1	1	5%
Lots	0	1	1	5%
Total	9	11	20	100%

Notably, six informants that mentioned a shortage in village food also added that there were enough local foods available, and that the shortage existed in the village canteens.

“Our village has enough of our local foods and resources, but people are always relying on food

¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/tuvalu-population/>

supply from the store or canteen which are a bit hard to get due to the impact of the lockdown.”

Over half of those surveyed (55%) observed an increase in farming activities, and over half observed an increase in both farming and fishing activities. Four informants (20%) did not report any noticeable changes in food production activities.

“Only people with land have more than enough. [There is an] Increasing number of people on the island, that’s why there’s not enough.”

Additionally, two informants mentioned the food preservation technique of salting fish, and one respondent mentioned the rationing of food to make supplies last longer. A majority of informants (80%) did not notice any changes in the sharing of food, while the rest noted the opposite attributing this increase in frugality to the COVID-19 situation.

Most informants noticed increases in the prices of staple foods: 85% of informants reported an increase in the price of rice and 70% reported an increase in the price of tinned fish.

Price of rice	Resp.	Price of tinned fish	Resp.
Increased	17	Increased	14
Decreased	0	Decreased	0
No change in price	3	No change in price	3
No answer	0	No answer	3
Total	20	Total	20

Fishing Pressure

More than half of the respondents (65%) reported an increase in numbers of people fishing. There were no notable differences in responses between women and men.

“People are fishing more nowadays since there is a shortage of food in the canteens.”

No. of people fishing now	F	M	Total	%
A lot less	1	1	2	10%
Less	1	2	3	15%
Same	1	1	2	10%
More	6	7	13	65%
A lot more	0	0	0	0%
Total	9	11	20	100%

In addition, nine respondents (45%) mentioned that fishing activities had also been affected by

the lack of fuel available, which led to a decrease in offshore fishing activities.

Resource Management

Notably, over half of those surveyed (70%) observed that fisheries management rules were not currently being broken. Only four individuals (20%) observed more people than usual not following the rules; harvesting undersized organisms and fishing in the *Te Akau* Conservation Area near Nanumaga Island.

No. of people breaking mgmt. rules	Total	%
None	14	70%
Less people than before	1	5%
Same	1	5%
More than before	4	20%
Total	20	100%

A majority of informants from Nanumaga Island (65% of all respondents) specifically mention the *Te Akau* Conservation Area through the *Kaupule* (Island Council) as assisting community fishers in their awareness of rules, and local and national fisheries management efforts.

“Management of our LMMAs (locally managed marine areas) is really helpful to increasing and producing more resources so it’s easy for our people to get more as they need.”

Potential Support Required

About half of those surveyed (55%) were not suffering from additional stressors. Nine respondents (45%) mentioned concerns over food availability, four (20%) mentioned worries for physical health, and four mentioned mental health (20%). When asked about possible assistance required, only nine respondents (45%) indicated the need for additional support from government at this time. Support requests included price control measures, extra medical personnel, financial assistance, and stricter border controls.

Conclusion

Tuvalu results have indicated that at the time of this survey:

- COVID-19 government restrictions affected the majority through disrupted shipping

- services and an increased population migrating from Funafuti.
- Net immigration of 28% to three of the four islands was observed. Outward migration was observed only from Nukufetau.
 - Food availability concerns were reported by half, whilst a third indicated that the shortage was for imported foods.
 - Increases in the prices of tinned fish and rice were reported by most respondents.
 - Increases in farming activities and fishing pressure were observed by half of the respondents.
 - Offshore fishing activities have been affected by fuel availability as reported by half the respondents.
 - Fisheries management rules remain largely respected. The majority of respondents from Nanumaga Island referred to the *Te Akau* Conservation Area as important in raising awareness of rules as well as other fisheries management matters.
 - When asked about potential support, requests included price control measures, medical personnel, financial assistance and stricter border controls.

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